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ABSTRACT

This booklet is designed to help undergraduate sociology majors find employment in related areas in which they would like to work. Topics include identifying personal interests and skills, researching possible careers, finding out what those careers are really like by interviewing people working in those areas, writing effective letters and resumes, applying for jobs, presenting oneself well in employment interviews, and avoiding rejection shock. Job hunters are encouraged to look beyond the classified advertisements to find the majority of jobs, which are never advertised publicly. A three-page bibliography giving further sources for career and job hunting information is also included. (IS)

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# EMBARKING UPON A CAREER WITH AN UNDERGRADUATE SOCIOLOGY MAJOR

by
Bettina J. Huber

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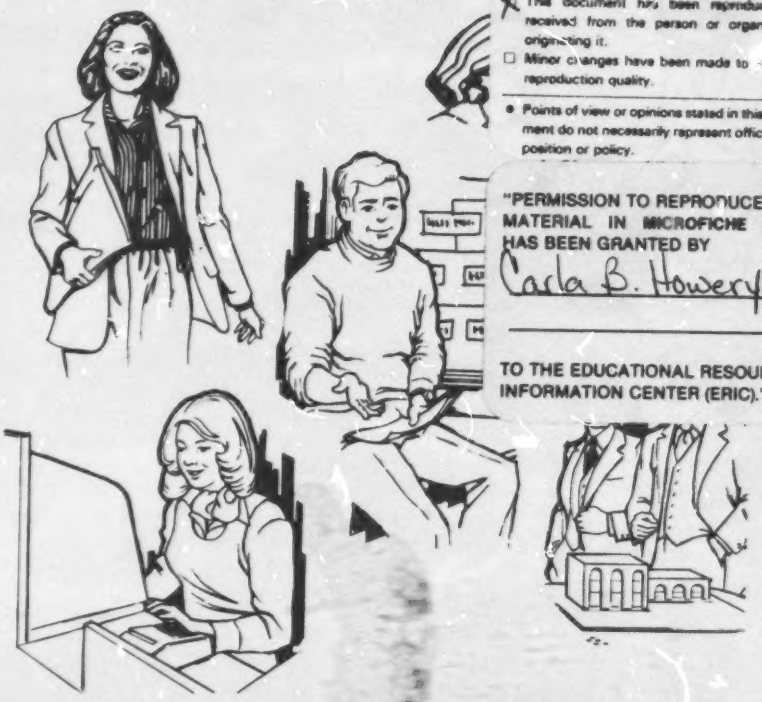

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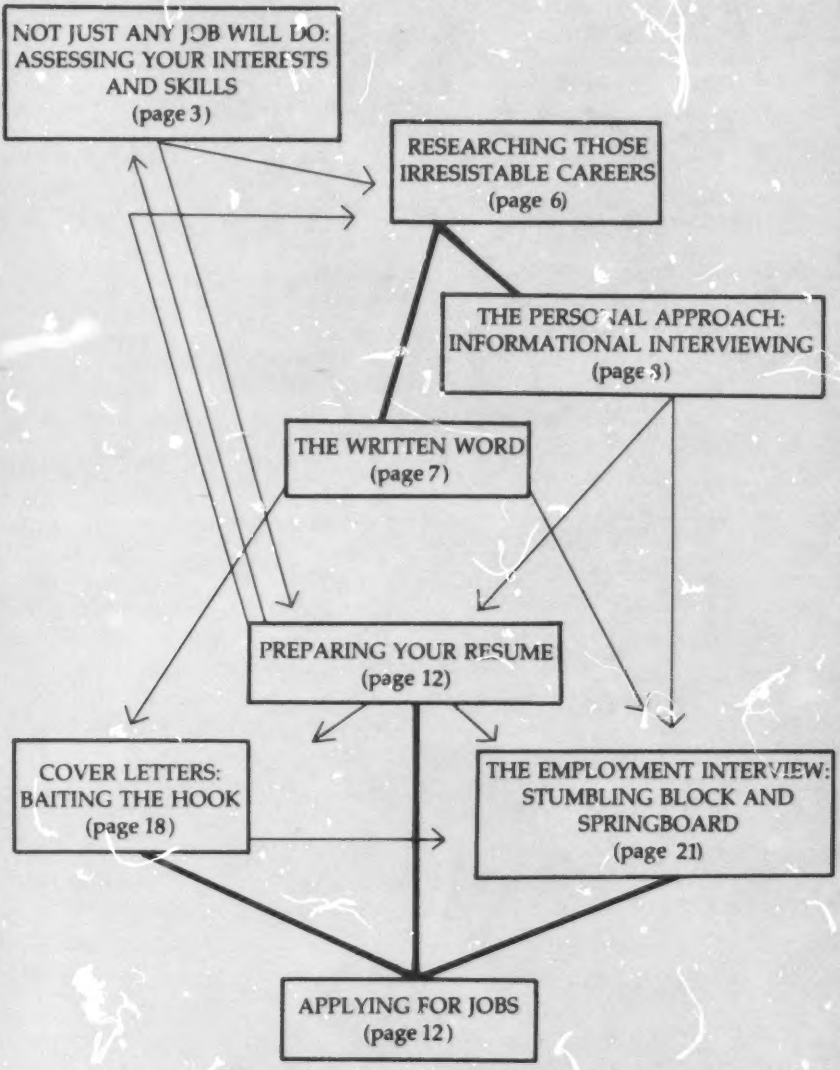
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# INTRODUCTION

Does the prospect of looking for a job after graduation fill you with dismay? Are you depressed by the current economic downturn and gloomy job prospects for liberal arts majors? These are common reactions. Yet, if approached properly, finding employment need not be traumatic. Rather, it can be a rewarding adventure involving discovery of your varied talents and skills, as well as the multiple career opportunities open to those with your college background. If pursued with an adventurous spirit, rather than solely out of grim necessity, the job you find is more likely to be personally rewarding.

The primary purpose of this booklet is to assist you in using your search for employment to full advantage, not only in the short term, but also in the long term. A second purpose is to highlight those sociological skills which are valued assets in the eyes of employers. Although employers routinely seek employees with particular skills, they are not aware that college training in sociology provides them. To say you have a sociology degree, therefore, serves primarily to confuse people, but if you detail your skills in widely understood terms, you are apt to catch their attention. Consequently, your key task in looking for a job is to demonstrate to each potential employer that your sociology degree is relevant to his or her vacancy.

People who are hired for challenging and rewarding jobs are not necessarily those with the best qualifications. Invariably, however, they are the most adept at locating choice positions (Irish, 1978: 75). Their number is small because most people rely on ineffective sources of job information. A 1976 study by the Census Bureau revealed that only 22-24 percent of those using the following four search techniques found employment as a result: classified ads; private employment agencies; college placement offices; and friends, relatives, teachers, etc. People who relied on Federal or State Employment Services fared even more poorly—only 14 percent found employment as a result (cited by Bolles, 1982). In large part these conventional channels are of limited utility to job seekers because approximately 80 percent of all vacancies above the entry level are not formally advertised (Bolles, 1979: 5-6). As Lathrop (1977: 89) remarks, "unpublicized openings run at a rate of four to one over those that are advertised, and, in the main, represent the most desirable opportunities". These "hidden" vacancies are publicized through word of mouth and the people hired tend to be known to the employer prior to the emergence of the vacancy. In light of this, much of the discussion that follows revolves around means of becoming acquainted with people having the power to hire you, but having no immediately available positions.

The aim of the job hunting strategy described in the following pages is to make an evaluation of your assets and available opportunities the basis for an adequate decision about what to do at the present time. Your undergraduate training in sociology is sufficiently broad so that a wide variety of career paths are viable. Which of these possibilities you wish to investigate in depth, and perhaps pursue, should be evaluated in light of your current interests and skills. At the same time, the economic realities of your current situation may not allow you the luxury of deferring employment or of accepting a poorly paid, but career-related position. Thus, your long-range career decisions and immediate job choices may conflict with one another.

Minimizing such conflicting demands involves consideration of the relationship between jobs and careers. According to *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, a career

involves permanent employment requiring specialized knowledge and training, while a job consists of "a piece of work". *Webster's* also defines a career as "a course of continued progress", which suggests that it can be conceptualized as a series of jobs with progressively greater responsibility and importance. This progression can take place through movement from one organization to another, as is the case with a political career, for example, or within a single organization (and then we speak of "rising in the firm"). For the college graduate, career decisions revolve around where to begin and how to take the first step in this lifelong progression. In such circumstances, the later stages of a career path are difficult to discern and decisions rest on the notion of future potential. The job you take at present, therefore, need not have a well-defined link to eventual career goals. Rather, it should provide the sort of experience that you can build on as you pursue your long-term objectives. Such an approach allows you considerable flexibility in finding a job that meets your immediate financial and other needs.

Although you should search for a job that speaks to both your interests and career goals, it is highly unlikely that the employment you locate will approximate your ideal. Any job you take will be more in keeping with some of your interests and needs than with others. You must be prepared, therefore, to make trade-offs and strike a balance between varying priorities and requirements. In consequence, the career decision you make at the present time will not be perfect, nor will it be valid for the rest of your life. Rather, it should involve a course of action appropriate to your current circumstances. For example, after assessing your natural talents and skills, and canvassing the careers of interest to you, you might decide not to take a job at the present time, but to seek graduate training. Or, you might decide to take an entry-level position (e.g., clerical, etc.) in a firm that you really want to work for, but which has no appropriate openings at present. This may be a risky strategy, especially for women, but in areas such as government service, publishing or journalism, a lowly beginning need not prevent one from gradually rising in the ranks.[1]

Locating employment that utilizes your interests and skills is a time-consuming process. It can take anywhere from three to nine months before one comes across a desired opening. In light of this, it is important to plan ahead, as you will need financial resources to support yourself until you discover an appropriate job. If economic necessity requires you to begin work immediately, get what Irish (1978: 97) refers to as a stop-loss or "grunt" job. Such work allows you to keep body and soul together, without depriving you of the time to carry on your career investigation. Shift work, in restaurants or supermarkets for example, is ideal in this respect, as it allows you to be free during other people's working hours. Another possibility is to work full-time at a tedious, but well-paid, job until you have saved enough money so that you can afford to be unemployed for several months.

Finding a job that takes advantage of your talents and experience requires time, patience and perserverance. Such a careful search involves three major phases: assessing your interests and skills; researching the careers you find appealing; and applying for specific jobs. Each is discussed in turn in the following pages. This is not to imply that one phase inevitably leads to the next, or that they are mutually exclusive. As the Table of Contents indicates, each element informs the others. Knowledge of your interests and skills assists you in researching careers, which, in

[1] Doing so requires a sympathetic boss. Bear this in mind as you interview for specific jobs and make a point of inquiring about the possibility of moving into more responsible positions.

turn, informs the content of your cover letters and how you prepare for employment interviews. In addition, informational interviews provide information which allows you to tailor your resume to fit specific jobs. At the same time, preparing your resume gives you insight into which careers to research and helps clarify your interests and skills. Finding rewarding and challenging employment is not simply a matter of completing a series of discrete steps. Rather, it involves immersing yourself in a complex process of discovery, which has a number of distinguishable, but not separable, elements.

## NOT JUST ANY JOB WILL DO: ASSESSING YOUR INTERESTS AND SKILLS

When undergraduates begin thinking about careers they would like to pursue, they often focus on what they are qualified to do. This is not the best approach, in part because the sociology major provides a general set of skills applicable to a wide variety of jobs.

It is equally inappropriate to focus primarily on what is currently in demand. Richard Berry, (*Behavior Today*, 1982), reports that during the last 10 years increasing numbers of 25 to 35 year olds have been seeking counseling at the University of California Counseling Center because, even though they are successful, they are unhappy in their work. Such early career dissatisfaction is a new phenomenon, and arises, Berry believes, when people consider only demand and salary in making their initial job choices. By ignoring their interests, they take on work they can complete successfully, but do not like. Choosing a career in terms of what is currently in demand is hazardous because of the high potential for job dissatisfaction. Further, one may court unemployment, since what is in demand today may not be in demand ten or twenty years from now.

### Are You a World Traveler, Night Owl or Gourmet?: Determining Your Personal Interests

In choosing a career it is essential to begin by assessing your interests, needs and life goals, regardless of how hazy they are. This is crucial because entering a career related to those personal preferences enhances your chances of enjoying and succeeding at your work. An inventory of your interests must be based on your own evaluation of possible life directions. What is best for your friends, or for your parents, may not be best for you. Although you should seek advice from those whose judgment you trust, the final decision about what interests you most must be your own.[2]

Determining your interests, and specifying them precisely, is often a difficult task. A good way to begin is with a list. Sit down one afternoon or evening and write down everything that interests you. If absolutely nothing comes to mind, you might begin by considering what you dislike. While we may not know exactly what we like, we

[2] Although many children do not consider parents' opinions about their offspring's interests and talents of any value, you must be careful not to reject career options simply because your mother or father suggests them.

generally know what we dislike. You may find that making a list of what you hate reveals what you like. If that does not help, you might take one of the well-known interest inventories.[3] Once you have compiled a preliminary list of interests, leave it on your desk for a week or two, so you can add new items as they come to mind. When your list is complete, group related interests together, and rank order the clusters from most important to least important. Closely related to your interests is the question of what you find personally rewarding or challenging. Is it a high salary, helping others, power?

Insofar as your career delimits your geographical location and available time, you should consider regional and lifestyle preferences in choosing your work. This involves determining whether some of your interests or hobbies require certain types of geographical settings. For example, if you love the wilderness, you would not want to look for work in most major cities, or if you are addicted to live opera, you would not be happy in many small towns. There are always exceptions, of course. Another issue is your family. Do you plan to marry and/or have children? If so, do you feel that a family thrives best in non-urban environments? In this case, you should settle in a small town or suburb. If, on the other hand, a wide array of cultural activities is essential to your well-being, urban settings would be more appropriate than rural areas. And finally, if you like to travel, you might give preference to a career that allows for extended vacations (and presumably a high salary to finance your jaunts).

In addition to the above, you should spend some time thinking about the characteristics of the job setting you would find most congenial. Consider such issues as: whether you like or dislike routine; how much supervision you need or want; whether you want autonomy in defining your tasks; if you want to work closely with your colleagues or relatively independently; how rigidly you want to adhere to a work schedule; etc. The advanced version of *The Quick Job-Hunting Map* provides a helpful structure for sorting out these preferences, as well as your interests. It is available for $1.50 from Ten Speed Press (Box 7123, Berkeley, CA 94707).

Ideally, the job you locate will accommodate all your major interests and preferences. In all likelihood you will not discover such employment, however. Instead, you will have to compromise some of your interests in light of job market constraints and immediate needs (e.g., to earn sufficient income to support yourself, etc.). Inevitably you will have to find a means of balancing these conflicting demands. So, be prepared for some trade-offs and be willing to adapt your personal preferences to suit the situation at hand. For example, your love of live opera may be satisfied by periodic trips to a nearby metropolitan center, or your preference for "roughing it" may have to be confined to weekend hiking and skiing trips.

### What Can I Do?: Identifying Your Skills

Like interests, skills are multiple and diverse. Fundamentally, there are three types: self-management skills, functional skills and work content skills. The first are generally referred to as personality or character traits, while the second are those necessary for dealing with basic aspects of any occupation. Work content skills are acquired on the job and revolve around specific procedures, languages or subject

[3] Examples are: Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory; Career Assessment Inventory; Kuder Career Interest Survey; The Self-Directed Search: A Guide to Educational and Vocational Planning. Many campus Counseling Centers administer these free of charge.

matter. As such skills are generally specialized and relate to individual jobs, they are not dealt with here.[4]

Although self-management skills can be cultivated and acquired later in life, they tend to be personality traits that are characteristic of you, regardless of activity. Examples include punctuality, enthusiasm, neatness, and warmth. These skills are relevant to career choice and you should give preference to occupations where your "natural" talents are an asset rather than a liability. For example, if you find it impossible to be punctual, you should not take a job where adhering to a strict time schedule is essential. Self-management skills useful in a wide variety of occupations include: assertiveness, calmness, concentration, diplomacy, empathy, enthusiasm, flexibility, good judgment, honesty, integrity, initiative, drive, loyalty, orderliness, patience, persistence, reliability, dependability and tactfulness (Curtin and Hecklinger, 1981: 20). Skills particularly valued by employers are determination to succeed, desire to learn and grow, common sense, clear goals, an eye for detail and accuracy, and love of hard work. The last is the most essential (Yeomans, 1981).

Functional skills are akin to job qualifications and can be acquired through education, as well as occupational experience. In addition, they can be transferred from one setting to another. When screening entry-level candidates, employers look for three types of functional skills:

*Interpersonal Skills,* including the ability to work cooperatively and get along with co-workers.

*Communication Skills,* or the ability to express oneself clearly in *both* verbal and written form.

*Analytic Skills,* particularly problem-solving ability and expertise in data analysis.

Given the importance of these skills, you should stress them during all phases of your search for work. In particular they should be highlighted in resumes and during job interviews.

Effectively communicating your abilities to others involves translating your educational experience into training in specific skills. For example, if you have taken courses in sociological methodology or participated in research, you can state that you have acquired analytic skills as a result. If you have had specific training in survey research or observational methods, be sure to make this clear—always be as precise as possible. In addition to methods, theory courses can provide training in analytic thought. Social psychology courses, on the other hand, especially if they involve discussion of counseling techniques, may give rise to interpersonal skills such as empathy and understanding of others. And finally, insofar as you have written term papers or given class reports, you can state that you have developed and refined your communication skills.[5]

In addition to the basic functional skills enumerated above, training in sociology provides more specialized transferable skills. For example, courses in organizational theory, one of sociology's core concerns, provide the tools to analyze and understand organizational problems. With the current emphasis on improving productivity and corporate organization, such knowledge can be an important asset. By

[4] For more detailed discussion of these three types of skills, see Bolles (1978) and Curtin and Hecklinger (1981a: 20-25).

[5] Term papers have the virtue of providing concrete evidence of your writing ability. Thus, they can be shown to prospective employers, provided you have retained them. Given the potential utility of term papers for job hunting, opportunities to write them should be taken advantage of rather than avoided.

the same token, as American industry ventures beyond its national borders, insight into non-Western societies will be valuable. Courses in cultural anthropology provide such knowledge, as does comparative sociology. Further, courses dealing with sociological sub-fields may equip you for more specialized jobs. For example,

—training in race relations may be an asset if you are seeking employment in the personnel department of a firm with a multiracial workforce.

—background in urban sociology can be put to good use in an urban planning agency.

—courses focusing on sex and gender roles serve as valuable background for the affirmative action field.

—training in criminology is sought by agencies dealing with criminal justice, probation and juvenile delinquency.

—courses in social psychology, by providing knowledge of human motivation and attitudes, are valuable for sales, marketing and advertising, as well as for work involving counseling.

In defining your skills remember that quality is more important than quantity. Do not spend time worrying about whether your skills are sufficient; effectively highlight those you have. It is worthwhile to be inventive in describing your skills, but *never* misrepresent yourself. Above all, do not leave it up to prospective employers to define the virtues of sociological training. Tell them, by clearly spelling out your skills.

If you are planning a career in business, it might be advantageous to supplement your sociology courses with a few in business economics (e.g., retail sales, marketing, etc.). Computer science courses are also useful, as are those dealing with energy, one of the major problems currently confronting American business. If you are more interested in a career in the service sector, a number of social work courses (e.g., history, case work) can be an asset. And some political science is useful if you are considering public administration.

## RESEARCHING THOSE IRRESISTABLE CAREERS

Once you have developed a clear picture of your interests and skills, you are ready to begin the next phase of your career planning. This involves finding out as much as you can about the careers you are interested in pursuing. During the course of your research, you should ascertain how your interests, and particularly your skills, are related to each career you are considering. Do not allow such concerns to restrict you unduly, however, as most talents and qualifications can be shaped to fit a wide variety of occupations. In fact, one of the central objectives of your research is to determine how your talents can be articulated so that they match the needs of employers.

The first step in this phase of your career search is to make a wide-ranging list of all the occupations you think you might be interested in pursuing. In compiling your list you might ask your parents, teachers, and friends for advice. Ask them what careers they think you are best suited for and insist upon their specifying the special talents you have for any given occupation. Do not allow your list of potential occupations to become too broad. It is wiser to focus on those which clearly provide the sort of work

you desire, as this allows you to maximize your chances of finding a congenial job (Irish, 1978: 75).

Once your list of potential careers is complete, you need to find out as much as you can about each one of them. The most effective means is through first-hand experience. This involves getting a part- or full-time job in one of your areas of interest, or doing volunteer work for an extended period. It may also involve completing an internship or getting college credit for paid employment (known as "cooperative education"). If your department does not have programs of this sort, inquire at the Placement Office. Be persistent, as the latter may not be used to placing sociology students, and may need some encouragement to do so. Even if your practical experience involves work of little significance, you can use the opportunity to observe what others are doing and what you might someday be responsible for. More importantly, you can talk to people doing the sort of work you are interested in and ask them to give you their view of their occupation. First-hand experience also allows you to establish contact with people who might be able to tell you where to look for openings and whom to approach once you begin looking for a job in your chosen field. In consequence, if you have had past experience in your area of interest think back to whom you met and whether you can renew any acquaintances that might be helpful. If getting additional practical experience is an option, be sure to take advantage of the opportunity, as this is one of the most effective means of getting permanent employment.

**The Written Word**

If you are interested in several careers and must make a decision within six months, it is not feasible to get practical experience in diverse areas. Under such circumstances, you should consult the wide array of material describing individual careers. Either the campus library, the Placement Center, or the Career Counseling Center should have one or more volumes of job descriptions. Some of the basic sources are listed in the section on "Suggestions for Further Reading" at the end of this booklet (see page 29). In addition to concrete descriptions, material on career choice and the nature of the current job market should be available.

Much of the last category consists of forecasts of prospects in particular fields. For example, a recent article in the *New York Times* (Yeomans, 1981) asserts that liberal arts graduates are most likely to find employment in the following areas: retailing; banking; insurance; advertising; the non-profit sector; government; the military; air travel; and financing. Of these, the best prospects were said to be in sales. There are a number of reasons why forecasts such as these should be taken with a grain of salt. First, they are notoriously inaccurate; yesterday's scarcity is tomorrow's glut and vice versa.[6] Second, no matter how overcrowded a field is said to be, there are always some openings. And, third, if you are not interested in a field, you should not enter it, no matter how good the opportunities. At best, therefore, forecasts can tell you how hard you will have to work at finding a position in your chosen field. Of course, if you find several areas equally attractive, projections of likely prospects for the next ten years can be helpful.

In addition to being cautious in your use of job market forecasts, you should be critical of everything you read, as some career information is inaccurate. One reason

[6] Recall that, until a few years ago, people were discouraged from studying engineering because of the supposed over-supply. Today, the shortage is critical in some areas.

is that library material may no longer be current. Always check the publication date before you read anything; the more recent it is, the better. Another source of inaccuracy is bias. Generally, this is not the product of purposeful misrepresentation, but of excessive enthusiasm. Industries, for example, often over-sell the opportunities in their area. If possible, you should consult more than one source in researching various aspects of an occupation. This is a particularly important safeguard in dealing with issues such as salary, which are subject to variation and rapid change. Further, be innovative in your search for information. Do not limit yourself to the library, but go further afield. Many businesses and public agencies provide information about themselves, which is available for the asking. Public relations and public information offices, especially if visited in person, are good sources for getting general descriptive brochures, catalogs, annual reports, newsletters, etc.

**The Personal Approach: Informational Interviewing**

In addition to consulting written material, it is valuable to talk to people who are doing the sort of work you would like to do. This allows you to get up-to-date information and a real sense of what an occupation is like. A good way to gathering information from practitioners is through informational interviewing. Once you have completed a series of these personal encounters, you may be able to eliminate some of the career options you have been considering. For those that remain viable, informational interviews allow you to become acquainted with a series of people potentially capable of offering you a job. These informal contacts become part of the network that will eventually land you a job. Recent research shows that three out of four job seekers get first word of the opening they eventually fill through informal contacts (Germann and Arnold, 1980: 65).[7] Further, the odds of finding employment by contacting a series of employers are about one in four, as opposed to one in 20 for newspaper advertisements and one in 25 for employment agencies (Lathrop, 1977: 163).

But what is informational interviewing? In essence, it involves having an extended conversation with people practicing the occupations you are exploring. Your potential conversation partners should not be members of a firm's or agency's personnel department, but people actually doing the work you would like to do.[8] Further, they should be positioned above your potential entry level, so that they have the capacity and power to hire you at a later time. The virtue of such an approach is that you can talk to people who make employment decisions without being at their mercy. That is, you are in control during an informational interview because you are asking the questions and directing the conversation. In consequence, you need not be apprehensive about difficult or unexpected questions, as is the case in a conventional employment interview. Moreover, your subjects are under no obligation to you, and therefore, may be more forthcoming and helpful than they would be if you simply ask them for a job. The major constraint informational interviewing imposes upon the job seeker is that the search must be confined to a limited geographical area. It is quite feasible, however, to plan a brief interviewing trip to a new area, once you have completed the preliminary preparation and reading in your current location.

The trick to obtaining informational interviews is making initial contact with your

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[7] My thanks to Paul Reynolds for bringing this to my attention.

[8] Of course, if you are interested in personnel work, this would not apply. Under such circumstances, you definitely want to talk to people in the personnel department.

potential subjects. The first step in doing this is ascertaining the names of people heading units whose work is of interest to you. Consult annual reports and public relations or informational materials for such information or call the organization and ask for the name of the person heading a given unit.[9] Armed with the appropriate names, you are ready to make the initial contact. One way to proceed is simply to drop in on your prospective subject, but in most cases, this is not likely to succeed. Another possibility is to go to a place where journalists, nurses or company employees, for example, are known to hang out, and stike up a conversation. Calling your subject on the telephone and asking for an appointment is probably more effective. You would also be well advised to precede the telephone call with a letter. Say you are thinking about entering _____ as a career field and would like to get your subject's views on the field's opportunities and requirements before making a final decision.[10] Mention a specific time when you will call to make an appointment. Also specify how long the interview will take—a half hour to an hour should be sufficient in most cases—and adhere to this time limit.

Strangers may agree to meet with you if approached by letter or telephone because most people like to talk about their work, and are flattered to be asked for advice about what others should do (Irish, 1978: 79). Further, "...most people in responsible positions—from section heads to presidents and directors of major organizations—are highly receptive to men and women who come in with a strong interest in their field of work, activities, and problems and with some good ideas about them" (Lathrop, 1977: 167-168). Another reason strangers may agree to your interview request is that you are asking only for information and not for a job. It is very important not to be drawn into discussion of a particular opening during the course of the interview. You must maintain your emphasis on information throughout. Always state that you are considering the subject's career as one of several possibilities. Allowing yourself to be drawn into discussion of a specific position compromises your credibility. Should your interview subject be impressed with you, there will always be time to explore specific job possibilities after the first encounter.

Although strangers may be responsive to a polite request for an interview, undoubtedly your likelihood of success will be enhanced if you are referred to your potential subject by a friend. The best tactic is to have someone you know approach your subject and broach the possibility of an interview. Then, you can call at a later date to arrange the time and place. If this is not feasible, mentioning the name of a mutual acquaintance in your initial letter is helpful. To take full advantage of this sort of assistance, spend some time identifying people who might be helpful in setting up interviews. Probably the best possibilities are family members and friends, as the odds are about 50-50 that you will locate employment through someone who knows you (Lathrop, 1977: 63). At the same time, some of your sociology faculty may be knowledgeable about employment opportunities, and can be particularly helpful in arranging informational interviews as a result. In addition, your department may have a list of recent graduates and their areas of employment. If any are engaged in the sort of work you are interested in, they are good contacts because of your common college ties. It pays to look even further afield than this. Neighbors may be

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[9] If asked why you want to know, say you need to write the person a letter or are working on a personalized promotional mailing.

[10] Another possibility is to say you have been assigned a term paper which must be based on personal conversations with several people about the nature of their work.

helpful, as may friends of friends. Even people you meet at parties may know someone you could profitably interview. Other means of locating useful contacts include looking through your high school or other alumni publications to see what your classmates are doing.[11] In fact, while you are involved in the process of defining a career direction you should evaluate everyone you meet in terms of their ability to help you.

Assuming you have succeeded in arranging an informational interview, what do you do then? You prepare for it by drawing up a list of questions to pose to your subject. Exactly what you ask will differ with each interview, but there are certain general topics you will always want to pursue. These include: current problems or challenges facing the field; entry requirements; the employment outlook; working conditions; career mobility; and salary prospects. Asking about the last topic prepares you to deal with the essential issue of salary during an eventual employment interview. In addition, such discussion will give you a notion of your likely starting pay. Many employers complain that college graduates have unrealistically high expectations about their initial earning power. So, knowing what you can realistically expect is an advantage. The starting salaries offered to BA recipients are not designed to provide a high standard of living in an inflationary era. But, in some cases, one can substantially increase one's earning power during the first years of employment.

Table 1 lists a series of questions that are relevant to most informational interviews. Where possible questions should be tailored to the subject's organizational context. As you will have read all the written material available about his or her agency prior to arranging the interview, this should not be difficult. Such reading also allows you to display a knowledge of the firm during the course of the interview. The only question in Table 1 that need not be tailored to fit the circumstances is the last question. It is an essential one, however, as it is a way of obtaining other informational interviews. If possible, get the names of several potential subjects before leaving. If you do, the number of strangers you approach for interviews will be limited.

Following the interview, be sure to write your subject a thank you note. Simple courtesy demands that people be thanked for spending time with you. If you were impressed with the firm or agency you visited, the thank you note can perform an additional, very important function. It can provide the vehicle for asking your subject to contact you if he/she hears of any job openings that you should know about. Be sure to enclose a copy of your resume when making such a request. But do not let matters rest there. Periodically contact subjects whose work setting you liked and ask them about openings. If the initial call strikes you as awkward, preface your query about vacancies with the statement that you have now decided to pursue the subject's career, and that his or her agency impressed you.[12]

Informational interviews should be evaluated in several respects. Begin by determining what you learned about the subject's occupation, being sure to assess the negative as well as the positive features of the career. Eligibility requirements are an important factor to consider in this respect. Did you find out what education or skills are needed for an entry level job? If they exceed your current training, your in-

[11] One can also join professional or trade associations and attend their annual conventions.

[12] For more detailed discussion of informational interviewing, consult Moore (1978) and Bolles (1982: 133-161).

**Table 1: QUESTIONS TO ASK DURING INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS**

- what are the current problems/challenges of your field or facing your organization?
- what do you find are the chief satisfactions and frustrations of your work?
- what is the range of your duties and responsibilities?
- what are the physical and psychological demands?
- what do you do in an average day?
- what are the working conditions?
- how does your work relate to organization as a whole?
- does this job allow you to acquire skills and responsibilities that will allow you to advance in the organization?
- what opportunities are there for career mobility?
- what sort of career path does a person in your field typically follow?
- could you use the skills acquired here in another organization or job?
- are employees encouraged to acquire further education?
- what are the requirements for entry into the occupation?
- what types of organizations employ people in your field?
- how did you get into this field and your present position?
- what is the employment outlook, locally and nationally?
- what is the pay range in this organization and what fringe benefits are there?
- what is one's probable and potential earning power in this field?
- what compromises do you have to make in this job that you find problematic?
- how might I go about getting into your field?
- what advice would you give someone considering your occupation?
- can you recommend other people who might be willing to discuss their work with me?

Note: most of these questions are drawn from a more extensive list in Curtin and Hecklinger, 1981b.

terviews may induce you to enter a graduate program rather than seek immediate employment. In addition to finding out about educational qualifications, you should determine whether prior practical experience is required and how it may be acquired. Further, the likelihood of rising in the ranks must be determined, as must your long-term earning power. A second evaluative consideration is the credibility of your subject. Some people are out of touch with the realities of their field and may give you poor advice as a result. Or, if they have succeeded too quickly, they may have a distorted view. Often, recent entrants have a more realistic view than those who are well-established, and can give you better tips on how to get hired. But they do not have the power to offer you employment. You may want to begin by interviewing such low level, but savvy, informants,[13] and work your way up to those able to hire you. Finally, round out your evaluation of your interview by determining if you should change your style and approach in subsequent encounters.

[13] Likely candidates are recent graduates of your department.

# APPLYING FOR JOBS

At some point you will find that you have assembled sufficient information to pinpoint one, or perhaps two, areas in which to focus your job search. Once you reach this phase of your career planning, you are ready to begin applying for specific openings. There are three major aspects of this process: preparing a resume; drawing employers' attention to your resume with an appropriate cover letter; and the employment interview. In the following pages, each is discussed in turn.

## Preparing Your Resume

A resume serves two functions. First, and foremost, it provides a means of organizing and presenting your qualifications so that you know what you have to offer. And second, the resume provides prospective employers with a written summary of your qualifications, and is a vehicle for communicating your abilities to them. In this respect, it should attract sufficient interest so that people will desire additional information about you. For, in the absence of personal contact with employers, the resume is your key to an employment interview, which, in turn, is your key to a job. In preparing your resume, your main task is to show that you have fully exploited the opportunities available to you, and not that you have unlimited talents. To accomplish this, your resume should be arranged so that it effectively highlights those skills, abilities and strengths that employers value (Lathrop, 1977: 75). Preparing a resume that serves you well requires considerable time, energy and thought. If hastily compiled, the final product will not be as clear, concise, well-organized or positive as it should be.

All resumes are similar in structure in that they set out an occupational objective and indicate how your qualifications relate to it. Your Professional Objective should be articulated in terms of a general job category rather than a specific title (i.e., personnel relations and not Assistant Director of Personnel). In addition, it should reflect your outstanding abilities and accomplishments, as well as employers' objectives rather than your own (Lathrop, 1977: 77-78). Thus, for the purposes of your resume, your objective is not to find rewarding work, but to improve personnel operations, for example, or increase an organization's effectiveness. By stressing what you can offer employers, rather than what they should offer you, your chances of being favorably considered for a job are increased.

There is no single prescribed resume format. Rather, your resume should be prepared so that your background appears in its best possible light. The conventional format is *chronological*, but it is by no means universally adopted. Using this resume arrangement involves giving an exact account of when and where one has worked, beginning with one's most recent job and listing other positions in reverse order. In each instance you would specify employers' names, dates of employment, and your responsibilities and accomplishments. Table 4 provides an example of a chronological resume (see page 16). If you have held jobs of steadily increasing importance, this format is an impressive way of presenting your employment history. Most college students do not have such progressive and extensive experience however. In this instance, resumes are more effective if articulated in *functional* terms. This format is a good one for people with a varied job background or for those changing careers. It emphasizes skills and contributions, rather than specific dates and jobs.

**Table 2: COMPONENTS OF A RESUME**

**Chronological Resume**

Name
Address
Home Telephone
Office Telephone (if you have one); do not list business address.

Professional Objective: state the position you wish to obtain; your relevant skills; and the type of organization you prefer.

Experience and/or Employment Record: list most recent job first and work backwards. Give the name and address of each employer and concisely describe your responsibilities and accomplishments. List dates of service. (See Table 4 for format.)

Education: list all degrees past high school. Begin with highest degree and work downwards. In each case, supply degree, institution, date of graduation, academic honors and major. List fluency in foreign languages.

Military Service: optional.

Special Skills: include data analysis skills, communication skills (verbal and written) and interpersonal skills.

Interests: include hobbies, athletics.

Memberships: in campus, civic, political and religious organizations. Mention any offices held or special responsibilities.

Background Information: optional. If advantageous may list age, marital status, health, number of children, etc.

References: state that these will be furnished on request. Never list references on your resume.

**Functional Resume**

Name
Address
Home Telephone
Office Telephone (if you have one)

Professional Objective: see above.

Skills and Abilities: list three or four area of expertise and specify how your work and volunteer experience relate to them.

Employment History: optional. List years employed, position, and employer.

Education: optional. See above for information to be listed.

Military Service, Interests, Memberships, Background/Personal Information, Publications, Awards/Honors: optional. May be listed if they are to your advantage. See above for specific information you might list.

References: state that these will be furnished on request.

(Adapted from: B.M. Curtin and F.J. Hecklinger, 1981c: 13-18.)

Table 2 summarizes the major components of each resume format. As you can see, similar information is included in each, but it is presented in different form. The only category invariably appearing in both resume types is the one entitled "References",

though some (e.g., Lathrop, 1977: 85) argue it is unnecessary, as employers assume you will supply references if asked to. When including this category, all you need say is "available on request". Never list your referees on the resume itself. If nothing else, doing so takes up considerable space. Moreover, it gives too much unnecessary information to potential employers, especially to those one may have second thoughts about. But you should assemble a list of three or four references that can be made available to anyone who inquires. These referees should be people who are familiar with your abilities as a worker or a student. Further, whenever possible, they should be established in the community, be it local or academic. This means approaching senior faculty (i.e., Full or Associate Professor), who are familiar with your work, before turning to those more junior.[14] Regardless of whom you choose as references, be sure to ask their permission before giving their names to employers, and provide them with a copy of your resume. In addition, if your college has such an arrangement, put your references on file in the Sociology Department or the Placement Office. That way they will be easily accessible, should you need them several years after graduation.

Table 3 provides an example of the type of resume a typical sociology major might compile. It utilizes the functional format because Mr. Claus' employment history is limited and some of his skills were acquired through course work. Including a separate category for job experience, as has been done in Table 3, is not essential. Doing so is justified only if greater clarity is achieved as a result. Notice that the Education category is not one of the first listed but one of the last. This is because a resume should highlight concrete skills and experience rather than degrees. In addition to listing degrees and special skills acquired after high school, include fluency in foreign languages and your grade point average, if it is exceptional (Lathrop, 1977: 81).

Table 4 takes the information in Table 3 and organizes it in chronological form. All this transformation involves is listing various skills and accomplishments under specific jobs rather than in separate categories. Note that dates of employment are not listed prominently, but unobtrusively included in each job summary. They could also have been placed in parentheses at the end of each entry. In compiling a chronological resume, you cannot leave time periods when you were not working or partially employed unaccounted for, but you can select a cut-off point (i.e., when you first began working).

Given Nicholas Claus' background, the chronological presentation is less effective than the functional, as it highlights his limited employment experience rather than his varied talents. In addition, skills acquired through college work are less effectively integrated in the chronological format. Since the paramount purpose of the resume is to highlight skills, and not job duties or degrees, the functional format is most useful in this particular instance.

Regardless of whether you adopt the functional or chronological style, you should follow a few simple principles as you prepare your resume. First, be selective. Do not incorporate everything you have ever done into your resume. Instead, list only those experiences, skills or personal background factors that will appeal to employers and

[14] Don't be shy about it. Even if you feel that a professor is not approachable, ask him or her to serve as one of your references if he or she gave you a good grade or was impressed with your work. The worst that can happen is that your request will be refused.

*Remember—including unnecessary personal information (e.g., age, marital status, health, etc.) on your resume increases the likelihood that you will discriminated against or unfairly excluded from the applicant pool. Among other things, it is illegal to ask job applicants about their marital status, parental status, state of health, date and place of birth.

**Table 3: EXAMPLE OF A FUNCTIONAL RESUME**

| | NICHOLAS CHRISTIAN CLAUS, JR.<br>67 North Pole Way, Anchorage, Alaska 99500.<br>(726) 822-5287 |
|---|---|
| PROFESSIONAL OBJECTIVE | POSITION IN COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION OR PUBLIC AGENCY—especially where social research and policy planning skills are needed, and organizational ability is an asset. |
| POLICY ANALYSIS AND PLANNING SKILLS | As Policy Analyst for Judicial Process Commission of Ecumenical Commission analyzed "Security Through Development of the Correctional Facilities Bond Act of 1981". Focused on implications for state budgeting and criminal reform. |
| FISCAL APPROPRIATIONS ANALYSIS | Analyzed fiscal impact of Correctional Facilities Bond Act and alternatives to it. Made policy recommendations to education officials. |
| LEGAL RESEARCH SKILLS | As Law Intern in offices of Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen and Rudolf, researched specific points of law to develop arguments in civil and criminal cases. Researched statutes and relevant cases for use as precedents. Issued notifications of claim and served papers—affidavits and orders to show cause. |
| SOCIAL CHANGE THEORY AND PRACTICE | Analyzed reasons for success of community action organizations in class on "Social Movements in American Society".<br>Key participant in successful campaign to mobilize opposition to Correctional Facilities Bond at community and university level. "The most effective campaign in recent years," according to the *Alaska Star*. |
| SOCIAL RESEARCH SKILLS | Designed and carried out survey of students' attitudes towards prison reform in class on sociological methodology. |
| EXPERIENCE | Policy Analyst, Judicial Process Commission of the Ecumenical Commission, Anchorage, Alaska, 1981.<br>Law Intern, Law Offices of Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen & Rudolf, Anchorage, Alaska, 1980. |
| EDUCATION | BA, University of Alaska, 1981<br>Major: Sociology<br>Special emphasis: Criminal Justice<br>Reading knowledge of French |
| MEMBERSHIPS | Chairperson, Student Union Recycling Task Force<br>Active member of Concert Board |
| INTERESTS | Music, hiking and baseball |
| PERSONAL | Born: December 25, 1960; Arctic Village, Alaska<br>Single; willing to relocate, travel<br>Enjoy devising policies that benefit individual, while fostering common good |
| REFERENCES | Available upon request. |

**Table 4: EXAMPLE OF A CHRONOLOGICAL RESUME**

NICHOLAS CHRISTIAN CLAUS JR.
67 North Pole Way
Anchorage, Alaska 4[illegible]500
Telephone: (726) 822-5287

PROFESSIONAL OBJECTIVE

POSITION IN COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION OR PUBLIC AGENCY—especially where social research and policy planning skills are needed and organizational ability is an asset.

EXPERIENCE

Policy Analyst, Judicial Process Commission of the Ecumenical Commission, Anchorage, Alaska, 1981. Analyzed "Security Through Development of the Correctional Facilities Bond Act of 1981". Focused on implications for state budgeting and criminal reform. Also, analyzed fiscal impact and alternatives to it. Made policy recommendations to education officials. Key participant in successful campaign to mobilize opposition to Bond Act at community and university level.

Law Intern, Law Offices of Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen & Rudolf, Anchorage, Alaska, 1980. Researched specific points of law to develop arguments in civil and criminal cases. Researched statutes and relevant cases for use as precedents. Issued notifications of claim and served papers—affidavits and orders to show cause.

EDUCATION

BA, University of Alaska, 1981
Major: Sociology
Special emphasis: Criminal Justice
Reading knowledge of French.

SPECIAL SKILLS

Experience in survey research.
Knowledge of successful community action strategies.

MEMBERSHIPS

Chairperson, Student Union Recycling Task Force.
Active member of Concert Board.

INTERESTS

Music, hiking and baseball.

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Born: December 25, 1960; Arctic Village, Alaska.
Single; willing to relocate, travel.
Enjoy devising policies that benefit individual, while fostering common good.

REFERENCES

Available on request.

be beneficial in your chosen career or job. Remember, inclusion of irrelevant and non-essential information can lead to your being excluded from consideration for a job. If using a functional format, list your strongest experience and qualifications first. Further, do not limit yourself to paid employment, but incorporate volunteer and extra-curricular college experiences, as well as skills acquired through course work. Selectivity is essential, as the ideal resume is confined to one page. Adhering to this limit is not mandatory, but should be your target. *In no case* should your resume exceed two pages.[15]

A second principle to follow in drawing up your resume is to stress your accomplishments and specify your abilities rather than job duties (Lathrop, 1977: 62-63). For example, working for the student newspaper involves writing articles, preparing lay-outs, and soliciting advertising. Rather than listing any one of these duties, state that you were responsible for initiating a new column, for devising new procedures for setting up issues, for increasing the advertising revenue by so many dollars, etc. Or, if you did volunteer work at a local family planning agency, say that you participated in establishing new procedures for processing clients more effectively, rather than that you assisted with the office work. Whenever possible, articulate your success or the results you produced in quantitative terms. Specify the dollars you saved, the percentage by which you increased output, etc. You can also include oral or written praise of your work, if it is brief.[16]

A third general principle of resume construction is ending on an upbeat or unexpected note (Lathrop, 1977: 83). This can be accomplished by including a brief description of job relevant traits in the "Personal Information" section. For example, you might say "I thrive on challenge", or "I frequently take on 'impossible' jobs, but am never defeated by them". Such an ending is likely to give an employer pause and insure that his or her last impression of your resume is positive.

In short, your resume should be designed so that it emphasizes your outstanding traits and shows prospective employers how your presence will benefit their organization. Succeeding in this endeavor requires both creativity and patience. A resume is not prepared in the course of an evening. Rather, it should go through several drafts, each of which is extensively rewritten and polished. As your proceed, try to reduce all your descriptions to the bare essentials. You can even adopt the sharply abbreviated format typical of telegrams (Lathrop, 1977: 85). Be sure that all the information you include is accurate, particularly dates. Use action verbs,[17] especially at the beginning of sentences, and the jargon appropriate for the field in question. Informational interviewing is an excellent means of determining currently fashionable terminology, as are want ads. It is also a good idea to prepare a more extensive master resume that can be tailored and changed to suit specific jobs. In doing so, your key task is to match your skills with the needs of the employer. For example, Mr. Claus might want to omit his success at mobilizing opposition to the Correctional Facilities Bond Act in applying for a job with a local criminal justice agency. On the other hand, in going after a position with an environmental organization, his skill at

[15] If in doubt about using one or two pages, remember that two neatly spaced pages look better than one crammed full of information. A good rule of thumb is that people with less than 10 years of work experience should confine themselves to one page. Those with more may use two pages (Lathrop, 1977: 84).

[16] Appropriate examples include: my professor remarked "Your paper was the best in the class"; as I left, my boss said, "You were the best summer intern/assistant I have ever employed"; etc. See Table 3 for another example.

[17] Examples are designed, implemented, managed, organized, supervised, analyzed, researched and mobilized.

fostering social change might be listed at the top of the resume. Although it may not always be feasible to modify skills to suit the job in question, your Professional Objective can, and should, be reformulated as different positions are applied for.

Once all the material to be included in your resume is assembled and suitably worded, the final copy should be carefully organized and neatly typed. In preparing it, try to arrange your material in an eye-catching manner. This effect can be enhanced by the judicious use of lines, stars and bullets (see Tables 3 and 4 for examples).[18] Once the final version is ready, your resume should be reproduced in a professional manner on high quality off-white paper. What this involves depends on how you are utilizing your resume. If you have decided to send your resume, with an appropriate cover letter, to a large number of employers, you should have it professionally printed (i.e., multilith or photo offset). If, on the other hand, you are preparing a resume that is tailored to a particular opening, you should probably make a high quality xerox copy. Another way to adapt your resume to a specific job is to underline those aspects of your experience that are most pertinent to the position in question. See Table 3 for an illustration.

Since preparing a resume is such a complicated and important task, you may feel inclined to get some assistance. Friends and faculty may be helpful in determining what you should include and how you might formulate it, as may the staff at the Placement Center. One can also have one's resume professionally prepared, but the danger in doing so is that most employers recognize the style of commercial houses and will discount your resume's accuracy as a result (Lathrop, 1977: 86; Irish, 1978: 100). Further, no professional can pinpoint those accomplishments and skills that make you unique as effectively as you can.

### Cover Letters: Baiting the Hook

Once your resume is complete, it needs to come to the attention of employers searching for new personnel. If you have completed a series of informational interviews, the task of locating vacancies is considerably simplified. By periodically checking in with the contacts you have established, you should hear about openings. In addition, you might conduct additional informational interviews designed to establish contact with firms or agencies likely to have vacancies in the near future. Although you should still approach your new subjects by requesting information about their work, your aim is to determine if the organization is likely to hire someone like you in the near future.

There are several other means of becoming aware of who is hiring, though confining yourself to currently existing vacancies may not be your best strategy, as will become apparent shortly. One obvious source of available positions is the classified section of the newspaper. More often than not, this is of limited utility, however, as most openings are not advertised. Further, bonafide ads generate so many replies that the chances of being invited for an interview are slim.[19] Research indicates that, on the average, organizations extend one interview invitation for every 245 resumes they receive in response to advertisements or by other means. The

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[18] Additional examples of how your resume might be organized can be found in Lathrop (1977: 67-74; 94-115).

[19] Read the Classified Section with care, as some advertisements are misleading. They are designed, not to recruit someone for a specific job, but to gather resumes that may be useful sometime in the future.

ratio of interviews granted to resumes received varies from one in 36 to one in 1,188 (Bolles, 1982: 14). Of course, if want ads are placed in professional or technical journals, the situation is different and they can be a useful guide to openings.

Another means of locating vacancies is to inquire at the United States Employment Service. With 2,000 offices nationwide, it provides information on positions available in your area and elsewhere. A third avenue to concrete openings, if you are interested in business, is the corporate recruiters who make annual visits to college campuses. In most cases, the Placement Office arranges interviews for interested students. If you meet with a recruiter, treat your encounter like an employment interview and follow the procedures outlined in the last part of this section. Finally, alert your friends, relatives, college teachers and other contacts to the fact that you are looking for concrete openings. Give them a copy of your resume and ask them to bring appropriate vacancies to your attention. As was the case with informational interviewing, evaluate everyone you meet in terms of their ability to assist you in this new phase of your job hunt, and question them about openings that have recently come to their attention.

As most vacancies are not formally advertised, informal contacts are your most promising source of job leads. But you might be wise to adopt a more active approach, and bring your resume to the attention of employers likely to hire someone like you, regardless of whether they have a vacancy at this very moment. Such a strategy is most effective if you are seeking a position in another area of the country. It involves sending your resume to a carefully selected group of organizations whose work interests you, and following up with a telephone request for an interview.

Determining who to approach involves the sort of library research discussed earlier (see page 7). Scan annual reports and public relations material to locate suitable prospects. In doing so, note the name and title of the person heading the unit in which you wish to work. If it is not listed, call the organization and inquire. Should you be unable to determine who is in charge, address your letter to the firm president or agency head. In all other cases, address it to the person directly responsible for hiring you and not to the personnel office.[20] Should you, or someone you know, be acquainted with an employee of one of the firms or agencies you are approaching, they, rather than the unit head, might be sent a copy of your resume. In this instance you would inquire about procedures for obtaining an employment interview in your follow-up telephone call. See the discussion on page 9 for tips on how you might identify such "in-house" contacts.

Given the fact that employers pay no attention to the vast majority of resumes they receive, yours must arrive with a very effective cover letter, if it is to receive serious attention.[21] Such a letter is individually typed and opens with a sentence designed to pique an employer's interest. The body of the letter briefly outlines those skills and accomplishments likely to arouse curiosity. Emphasize your ability to solve problems commonly encountered by the employers you are addressing. Your letter should appeal to the recipient's self-interest, and give the impression that hiring you would improve efficiency, profits, productivity, etc. If you are writing in response to an advertisement, indicate where you heard about the position you are applying for, and how you can be reached for an interview. In asking for the latter, do not be tentative or leave it up to the employer's discretion to contact you. Simply propose in

[20] If you are interested in personnel work, this does not apply.
[21] The following discussion is drawn from Lathrop (1977: 133-142).

**Table 5: SAMPLE COVER LETTERS**

Ms. Jane Jones
Department of Health
State Capital
Anchorage, Alaska

Dear Ms. Jones:

Can your professional staff use someone who:

—has experience as a policy analyst?
—is able to assess the fiscal impact of legislation?
—is familiar with legal procedures?
—has a grasp of how citizens are affected by social change and upheaval?
—has experience in the use of social survey techniques?

I possess these abilities, as the enclosed resume indicates, and would like to employ them for the benefit of your agency.

In the belief that you will soon need skills of this kind, I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you. I am confident that you are in a position to advise me on where my talents can be put to best use. I hope you will not mind my calling you later this week to arrange a brief interview.

Cordially,

Nicholas C. Claus, Jr.

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Ms. Sally Smith
Defenders of Civil Liberty
1000 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York

Dear Ms. Smith:

Can your organization use someone with proven ability to mobilize grass roots support for or against pending legislation? Last year I played a major role in mobilizing university and community opposition to a Correctional Facilities Bond Act, which would have channeled several million dollars into new construction, while neglecting rehabilitation programs. The Act was defeated by a resounding margin. In addition to experience as a community organizer, I am familiar with procedures for assessing the fiscal impact of legislation and conducting opinion polls. The enclosed resume highlights these skills.

May I come to see you to discuss the possibility of your using my talents in your organization? I will be in New York early next month and will call in advance to arrange a meeting.

Yours truly,

Nicholas C. Claus, Jr.

a forthright manner that you be contacted for an interview in the near future (Curran and Telesky, 1980). If you are not responding to an ad, it is wiser to avoid the word "interview". Ask for a meeting or inquire "when we might get together". If the employer is in the vicinity, indicate you will call in the next few days to arrange a meeting to discuss employment or what your subject would advise you to do as you seek work. In writing to employers in more distant areas, indicate you will contact them just prior to, or during, an upcoming visit to their area.

All essential information can be incorporated into a fairly brief letter, as the examples in Table 5 indicate. The letter to Ms. Jones illustrates how a cover letter can briefly summarize all your major accomplishments. In approaching Ms. Smith, on the other hand, Nicholas Claus has used his letter to elaborate on material that could not be included in his resume. Other examples of persuasive cover letters can be found in Lathrop (1977: 143-161). In using them to develop your own cover letters, be sure to reword and adapt them to your own purposes.

Mail your letters so that they arrive on Tuesday or later in the week. Monday's mail tends to be heavier than usual, and if your letter arrives then, the chances of its getting lost in the shuffle are greater. The first day of the week is also more hectic than others, so request interviews for later in the week. Your telephone call asking for a meeting should be timed so that it occurs a day or two after your letter arrives. If you allow more time to elapse, your letter will be forgotten. Even if your letter is remembered, there is a good chance that you will receive a negative response to your interview request. If the employer's reason for not meeting with you is that his/her firm has no openings, counter with a request for advice about current developments in the field. Add that you know he/she is very knowledgeable about such matters, and therefore, a brief meeting would be invaluable. If the response to this gambit is, "Sorry, I'm too busy," ask if there are others in his/her organization, or elsewhere, that you should contact. In approaching anyone you are referred to as a result, be sure to begin by naming the person who suggested that you call.

Lathrop (1977: 90) indicates that 200 resumes with appropriate cover letters will give rise to about 12 interviews. This is not a great many, but may be more than sufficient. Moreover, this response rate can be doubled by simply approaching the same employers a month later without mentioning your first mailing. Even greater success may be achieved by writing to a much smaller number of employers (i.e., 10-20), after researching their organizations in detail and carefully tailoring their letters to their individual needs.

**The Employment Interview: Stumbling Block and Springboard**

Once your cover letters bear fruit, you will be confronted with the last major challenge of your job search: the formal employment interview. This hurdle is inevitable, even if you learned of the vacancy in question through informational interviewing. This does not limit the utility of the latter, however. Quite to contrary, the informational interview provides valuable preparation for the more formal interchange that follows. Due to your prior contact with the agency or firm you are applying to, you will have acquired a fund of knowledge about its problems and operating procedures. As a result, you will appear knowledgeable during the employment interview, which is a great asset. Should the interview request come from someone in the Personnel Office, rather than from your contact, say as little as

possible about your qualifications on the telephone. The purpose of such questions about your background is generally to eliminate you from the applicant pool. So, be careful not to allow yourself to be interviewed on the phone. Say you appreciate the caller's interest, but that there are no simple answers to his/her questions. Add that such matters are best discussed in depth during a personal interview.[22]

The immediate purpose of an employment interview is to give prospective employers an opportunity to determine which of several candidates is most appropriate for a given vacancy. Since any job involves more than perfunctory completion of a set of tasks, your character and demeanor will be assessed during the interview. What the employer is after is an assessment of the whole you. Although you cannot avoid such scrutiny, you need not let the interview be nothing more than a one-sided evaluation. The employment interview also provides an opportunity to assess the pros and cons of the position for which you are applying. Even if you have been impressed with a firm or agency during prior contact, this particular job may not be to your liking. So, be sure to give them the once over, while they look you over. Moreover, you might let the interviewer know you are doing this by specifying your own requirements for the job in question, and inquiring whether they can be met.

Employers generally do not end up hiring the person best qualified for a given job. Rather, they fill their vacancy with the person whose performance during the employment interview impresses them most. For the applicant, therefore, the interview is the most important hurdle in the job hunting process, and putting one's best self forward is mandatory. To succeed at this crucial juncture you do not need to be innately gregarious or a polished conversationalist. Rather you need to be thoroughly prepared. This means knowing what points you want to make *before* you ever set foot in the interviewer's office. In particular, know how your skills and abilities will be useful in the job for which you are applying. Also, be prepared to specify a set of career goals and how the position in question relates to them. Further, know about your field of interest, especially general employment prospects and the salary range. And, finally, be informed about the company or agency you are about to visit. If you have acquired this knowledge during your informational interviews, or through earlier library research, little additional information-gathering will be required. It is important to have facts and figures at your fingertips during the interview, and therefore, details about the firm's history and operation should be reviewed the night before. In some respects, preparing for an employment interview is akin to cramming for an oral exam.

In addition to assembling information that might be useful during the interview, you should try to anticipate possible questions and devise answers. Table 6 lists a series of frequently used queries. They relate to the following major topics: your skills and how they relate to the job being applied for; knowledge of your field of expertise; general character traits; any preferences or traits that might make you unsuitable for the position in question; and what questions you have about the firm or job. The latter should deal with matters such as the possibilities for career advancement, or the duties and responsibilities of the position for which you are interviewing. In exploring the nature of the job, devise means of using your questions to indicate how your skills make you the appropriate person to hire. Your questions should also reflect your knowledge of the company or agency with which you are dealing. Another matter you should ask about in some circumstances is

[22] My thanks to Philip Monchar for this tip.

**Table 6: FREQUENTLY ASKED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

- tell me about yourself.
- what was your rank in your college graduating class?
- why did you major in sociology?
- why should we hire you?
- what would you do to improve our operation?
- how do your skills relate to our needs?
- what are your future career plans?
- professionally, where would you like to be in 5 years? in 10 years?
- why do you think you might like to work here?
- how long will you stay with this firm/agency?
- why did you choose your particular field of work?
- what qualifications do you have that make you feel you will be successful in your field?
- what do you know about opportunities in the field in which you were trained?
- what are the disadvantages of your chosen field?
- what are your most outstanding characteristics?
- what do you really want?
- what are your greatest strengths?
- what are your greatest accomplishments to date?
- why do you think you would like this particular type of job?
- what have you learned from some of the jobs you have held?
- do you have an analytical mind?
- what have you done that shows your initiative and willingness to work?
- are you primarily interested in making money or in helping your fellow human beings?
- do you prefer to work with figures or with words?
- what books have you read recently?
- who has had the greatest influence on you?
- what causes you to lose your temper?
- what is the largest sum of money you were ever responsible for?
- what kinds of decisions are most difficult for you?
- how do you spend your spare time? what are your hobbies?
- what size city do you prefer?
- what are your ideas on salary?
- will you be able to put in extensive overtime or travel extensively?
- describe your health for me. Have you any serious injury or illness?
- what would you like to know about us?

Note: The above questions are taken from Curtin and Hecklinger (1981 : 26); Lathrop (1977: 183-185); and Irish (1978: 12[illegible]).

computerization of the office. Ask if new data processing capabilities are to be installed in the near future and whether this would affect your job.[23]

Two of the questions in Table 6 are tricky and deserve special attention. One

[23] Other specific questions you might ask include: (1) How many people have held this position in the last five years? Can I talk to any of them? (2) With whom would I work on the job? May I talk with them? (3)You've been with this organization for several years. What have you liked most and least about it? (4) Why exactly are you hiring someone for this job? (5) Who would my immediate boss be?

concerns salary. This issue is generally raised by the interviewer and is a treacherous one because asking for too little is as incorrect as asking for too much.[24] If you have explored the matter during your informational interviews, or scanned the want ads, the question itself should not pose any difficulty, as you will know what sorts of starting salaries are current. This still leaves the matter of how to respond. If your previous salary has been low, as is the case for most college graduates, it is good strategy to be vague about salary, since employers frequently use previous wage level as the basis for starting pay (Irish, 1978: 152). Try to turn the question back to the interviewer and get him/her to name a figure. If this succeeds, react neutrally to whatever sum is named (e.g., "Oh, I see."). Should the interviewer insist on a response, say you expect to be paid in keeping with the "industry norm". Only name actual numbers if there appears to be no other option, and then respond in terms of a range rather than a specific figure.[25] Like the issue of earnings, the question about your weaknesses is a tricky one, as you may exaggerate your shortcomings or bring up matters that might not prove problematic on the job. Your best strategy is to respond in terms of your strengths. Say something like "my greatest problem is that I find my work more satisfying than anything else"; or, "I am a perfectionist—I insist that everything be done just right".[26]

Once you have all your questions and answers down pat, be sure to practice your responses. At the very least, rehearse your answers out loud. If possible, get a friend or roommate to play the role of the interviewer.[27] As you respond, bear in mind that your primary task during the interview is to convince the person you are talking to that you should be hired in preference to anyone else. In consequence, you want to stress those skills, qualifications and character traits particularly relevant to the job in question. Be able to articulate your employment priorities, the employer's needs, and how the two mesh.

On the day of the interview, leave yourself plenty of time to get ready. Make sure you have several clean copies of your resume ready to take with you, as well as a list of your references. Also take along a portfolio of your work, if this is relevant (it might include term papers, publications, commendations, honors, etc.). After assembling everything you want to take with you, make certain that you are presentable. Be sure your hair is freshly washed and your clothes are clean. The jeans you normally wear to class are not appropriate attire for an employment interview, nor is your best party dress—choose something inbetween.[28] Try to arrive at the interview site ten minutes early, so that you can catch your breath and compose yourself. Although it is perfectly acceptable to read while you wait, it may not be wise to look at a newspaper, or poorly printed magazine, as you will end up with dirty hands. If you know it beforehand, memorize the interviewer's name. Take your cue about whether to use first or last names from him or her, and shake hands *firmly* when you meet.[29]

Once you are ushered into the office for the start of the interview, remember that:

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[24] If you ask for too much money, you will be viewed as having unrealistically high expectations, while if you ask for too little, you will be viewed as unable to assess your worth.

[25] Irish (1978: 145-168) presents a good discussion of how to carry on salary negotiations.

[26] Other "weaknesses" one can mention are being too ambitious or too conscientious.

[27] The Placement Center may be helpful in this respect. If you ask, the staff may assume the part of interviewer for you or let you videotape yourself during a mock interview. They may also help you prepare your resume.

[28] Men should wear a suit or a sports jacket and a good pair of slacks. In either case, a tie is in order. Women should wear a suit, or a dress suitable for everyday wear. Neither should be too revealing.

[29] If the interviewer does not smoke, ask permission before lighting up (Irish, 1978: 124).

- it does not pay to be nervous. Letting the jitters get the better of you is counterproductive. Resolve to do the best you can and banish all anxiety and nervousness. Equally important, be yourself during the interview. Otherwise, you will feel awkward and impress the interviewer as stiff (Irish, 1978: 116-117).
- you need to give an impression of confidence and certainty about your career plans and describe your accomplishments with conviction. Do not appear too eager to get the job you are interviewing for. Even if you are desperate, play it cool.
- you should look the interviewer in the eye as you talk. Eye contact is an important criterion in evaluating applicants' performance, so establish it early and maintain it. At the same time, staring fixedly at the interviewer is overdoing a good thing.
- it pays to be a good listener. Let the interviewer talk if he or she wants to. Listening is less strenuous for you than talking, and what the interviewer says may provide some clues about the sort of person being sought.
- you should answer all appropriate questions briefly and concisely, but take your time in doing so. Be as specific as possible, and use examples in discussing previous jobs. In addition, be honest and do not hesitate to admit your ignorance (Irish, 1978: 122). But, keep your comments about past employers and co-workers neutral—it is not good policy to criticize those you worked with previously.
- you need not respond to questions that are inappropriate (i.e., age, race, sex, ethnic origin, arrest record), or inquire into your personal life (e.g., marriage and family plans, etc.). If you do not wish to answer, be sure to prepare a polite means of declining. One approach is to respond by asking "Can you tell me why that question is important?" Another approach is to respond in the briefest possible way, adding "but I don't think this bears on my ability to do the work".
- the best way to show your interest in the job is to ask questions about it. Ask those questions concerning the organization as a whole first and those relating directly to you last (Curran and Telesky, 1980: 130-131).
- you should arrange for a means of finding out about the interview results before leaving. If the interviewer indicates that he or she will call you in the near future, but does not, you should call the firm or agency. Such persistence will be viewed favorably.
- you should never accept a job offer on the spot. Ask for several days or a week to think it over, so that you can give careful consideration to the pros and cons of the job. Sometimes, one's perspective changes dramatically, once the immediate excitement of getting an offer fades. Also, be sure to get all elements of the offer in writing before accepting, especially if a promise of future promotions is involved.

The first thing to do after an employment interview is to let out a sigh of relief and relax. Once you recover, evaluate your performance, trying to pinpoint areas in which you might have done better. There is no *right* way to interview, but there are better and worse ways. So, considering whether you performed at your optimum can assist you in the next interview. In thinking about these matters, it is helpful to know why people fail to get job offers after an interview. Table 7 lists some of the common reasons why employers reject applicants. Many appear trivial, but that is precisely why it is relatively simple to take the necessary precautions during an interview. Employers rarely tell you the real reason why you are not being hired, so you can discount much of what they say (e.g., you are overqualified; you lack the proper credentials, experience, etc.). Remember, the very fact that you were given an

**Table 7: REASONS FOR REJECTION**

- poor personal appearance
- inability to express self clearly
- lack of planning for career; no purpose and goals
- lack of interest and enthusiasm; indifferent
- unwilling to start at the bottom; expects too much too soon
- makes excuses; evasive
- lack of tact
- condemnation of past employers
- fails to look interviewer in the eye
- sloppy application form
- only wants job for a short time
- lack of knowledge of field of specialization
- no interest in work of agency
- unwillingness to travel or relocate
- lazy
- intolerant; strong prejudices
- narrow interests
- inability to take criticism
- late for interview without good reason
- asks no questions about job

(Adapted from Curtin and Hecklinger, 1981: 27.)

interview is a sign that your job campaign is succeeding and that you are very close to being offered a job (Irish, 1978: 136-137).

If you did not get the job, though you would have liked it, or if no immediate decision is to be made, write a thank you letter to the interviewer. Especially in the second instance, the sooner you get the letter off the better. In writing it, touch on some element of the interview. In that way the letter gives you an opportunity to make some point more clearly than you were able to at the time of the interview. You can even send along a copy of one of your term papers if it is relevant. A thank you letter shows your persistence and interest in working for the firm or agency in question. In consequence, it will enhance your chances of getting a job there, either at present or in the future.

Once you get to the interview phase of your employment search, be prepared for several rejections before finally landing a job you want. Although failing at this late stage is painful, regarding each interview as a learning experience can rob rejection of much of its sting.

## CONCLUSION: AVOIDING REJECTION SHOCK

In reading the preceding pages, you may have wondered why so little was said about the conventional job hunting strategies: answering want ads and distributing one's resume to vast numbers of employers. The reason is simple—they tend to be ineffective. Above and beyond this, conventional strategies generate numerous negative replies and few positive ones. If one is prepared for it, this outcome may not present a problem. But, as each disinterested response is far more painful than one expects, a great number may lead to "rejection shock". This can set in if negative job-hunting experiences become overwhelming. Once such shock occurs, you are unable to continue looking for work or do so unenthusiastically. You become certain that you will fail to get any position you apply for because of your inherent weaknesses and faulty skills. Once it sets in, rejection shock may last several months and require professional counseling (Bolles, 1982: 15; Curtin and Hecklinger, 1981c: 24-25).

The procedures outlined in the preceeding pages are designed to avoid the danger of rejection shock by minimizing the negative features of the job hunting process and maximizing your control over what happens. Informational interviewing is particularly effective in this regard. In addition, it helps to meet with friends who will boost your morale. One way to insure such contact is to join or form a job-hunting club. Such a support group provides reassurance and the opportunity to exchange employment leads. If you hit a dead end, despite everyone's help and good advice, do not hesitate to seek out professional career counseling. This may be available free of charge at the campus Counseling Center. Finally, bear in mind that identifying a desirable career and finding good employment require a great deal of work and effort, particularly during adverse economic times. During the six months or more it may take you to locate positions suited to your needs, patience and persistence will be essential virtues.

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